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Two U.S. representatives are calling on a ban of the dumping of sewage into the Great Lakes.

Every year, 24 billion gallons of sewage are dumped into the lakes Michigan, Superior, Huron, Erie and Ontario, despite the fact that the water from the lakes is used as drinking water for 40 million people in eight states and Canada.

On Thursday morning at the Shedd Aquarium, Reps. Mark Kirk (R-III.) and Dan Lipinski (D-III.) introduced legislation increasing the penalties for sewage dumping.

The bill would increase penalties for sewage dumping from \$25,000 per day to \$100,000 per day after the year 2027.

In presenting the legislation, Kirk and Lipinski praised the efforts Chicago officials have made to keep Lake Michigan clean, and slammed other cities along the Great Lakes where they said officials were failing to take action.

They called Detroit the worst of the worst.

"We dug the Deep Tunnel. As one engineer said, Milwaukee dug the not-so-deep tunnel.... Detroit has completely dropped the ball on its stewardship of the Great Lakes," Kirk said.

Kirk said officials in Detroit need to do what Chicago officials have -- find the money, change the city's ways, and improve infrastructure so sewage is not going into the lakes.

"The federal government only pays for a majority of these projects," he said. "You need a local matching fund to unlock those federal funds."

On its Web site, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department says it has put together a long-term plan to control sewer overflows into the Rouge and Detroit rivers, in a \$2 billion effort that is one of the largest sewer projects ever in Michigan history. The Detroit River is the primary source for Lake Erie.

Milwaukee has been a target of Kirk's ire on several past occasions when water management officials there dumped sewage into Lake Michigan.

The worst case was in May 2004, when heavy rains led the city of Milwaukee to discharge 1.7 billion gallons of untreated sewage into Lake Michigan. That led to criticism from both Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and Kirk, who called the sewage, "Cheesehead sewer water."

On Thursday, Kirk said Milwaukee is doing better. But he says there is a lot that is uncertain about how much other places in Wisconsin are dumping into Lake Michigan.

Two years ago, an expert said the Great Lakes were in serious danger due to sewage and other pollution.

The danger comes from a series of threats, of which the sewage that has forced beaches to close regularly over several years is one. Other threats include industrial toxins including mercury spewed by coal burning power plants poison the water and the fish, and alien species including zebra mussels and the ravenous Asian carp threaten the fish we eat and fishing businesses need to survive.

"We have no real ability to fight these things once they get into the Great Lakes," Davis said two years ago.

On Thursday, the Canadian group Environmental Defence said levels of toxic chemicals fish found in the Great Lakes were at alarming levels and were becoming more serious over time.

WBBM 780's Steve Miller contributed to this report.